

## MAKING YOUR WEBSITE WORK – THE BASICS

Our experience suggests that perhaps as many as 80% of Australian small business websites are unproductive. Sadly this is often because not enough research was done before the site was commissioned to a mate, a son or daughter, or perhaps someone who has done a bit of graphic design and desktop publishing and has turned their hand to the web.

Unfortunately most of these people have no more idea of how to make your website work than you. And if you have spent even \$200 to get a website and it has no meta information and it hasn't been registered with search engines you have just wasted \$200.

Every successful website has the following characteristics in common:

- They can be found by prospective customers.
- They have information that customers and prospective customers need.
- They are a true interface to the business, i.e. if you make an enquiry through them you get an answer.

### **PRIORITY ONE - TRAFFIC**

If your web site is up and running then you should use the resource [Check List For Existing Sites – Pt 1. Are People Visiting My Site?](#) to see if you are getting **relevant** traffic to your website and to ensure that it is listed appropriately in search engines.

Don't allow yourself to be fooled as far as stats go. People used to talk about Hits and they would always talk in huge numbers. Well it turns out that hits mean nothing. What counts are visits and not even all visits count. We would suggest that any visit by a user to your site that lasts less than half a minute is of no value to you.

I once had a customer that had added the keywords "school boys" and "school girls" to his website to increase his traffic. As expected up went his hits, but not one bit of business came from it. This empty traffic can be very deceiving. Inappropriate keywords and being listed in inappropriate directories and search engines will give you hits, but it won't get you any business.

### **PRIORITY TWO - CONTENT**

First things first. You must provide full contact details of your company, including street address, postal address, ABN and phone numbers. If you don't provide it on every page of your site make sure that the page that does contain all this information is just one click away.

Content is King, and it is your content, not the design of your site that will sway your customers. Update it regularly and give your users a reason to come back. When we first began to research what makes websites successful I came across a site that was packed with information, on all sorts of subjects. I returned a few times over the following weeks to find that it was being updated every couple of days.

This was very impressive, so I emailed the web master and he told me that he had had the website going for about a year and he was happy to report that he had up to 100

visitors per day. Well, those were old figures; we asked him to insert some code that would more accurately measure the traffic and it turned out that he was getting around 5000 visitors per week. I can confidently state that these visitors were not going there because the site looked good. It was one of the uglier sites I have visited but I, along with everyone else, was so interested in the information that we paid little attention to the design and layout.

### **PRIORITY THREE – A TRUE INTERFACE**

Websites are not magic, they can generate leads but they don't make follow up phone calls and write emails. If you have gone to the effort to create a website, you need to make allowances in your business for someone to respond to the inquiries.

- Ensure someone is responsible for replying to emails that come in from the website.
- Ensure that the person responding has support information in a suitable format (e.g. PDF) that is ready to send.
- Create a few standard emails that can be used over and over again. An easy way to do this is through the signature feature of your email software. Just save your standard responses as different signatures and name them appropriately.
- Do what you say you will do. If your website says you will reply within 24 hours make sure you do.
- Provide complete contact details on your website and in your emails, this makes it easy for your users to use alternate methods for contacting you.

From the enquiries you are getting you should be able to make a to-do-list of the improvements that can be made to your website. Ensure these are collated and actioned.

### **THINGS TO KEEP AWAY FROM**

If you are new to the web, or if your website has been spectacularly unsuccessful to date, take the time to run through this list of things to keep away from, or to remove from your site.

- Large Images – these make your website slow to down load, people hate to wait and will leave your website before the home page finishes loading if you are not careful with your file and image sizes.
- Flash Presentations – the content of a Flash presentation cannot be indexed by search engines. If your website is all Flash then your website is as good as invisible to search engines.
- Frames – are very hard for search engines to index. Stay away from them. Frames became popular with web developers because it made their work easy. Unfortunately it also makes your website invisible.
- Navigation Links that are not obvious – Don't make your visitors guess about which way to go. Make your navigation links self explanatory. Stay away from images with no text.
- Contact Us pages that only contain a form and no other contact details. Having limited information on the Contact page is extremely frustrating for users.